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NOVA SCOTIA Government of Nova Scotia

New Teachers, New Courses Await Students

Department of Education and Culture (to July 99)
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More teachers -- and many new programs -- await students as they return to school this week. As an investment of more than $90 million affects classrooms this year, students also head back to more technology, textbooks and other classroom supports.

Overall, school boards hired more than 400 teachers this summer. Of these, at least 60 are new teaching positions.

Class sizes are going down for the second year in a row. This year, $2 million is dedicated to reduce class sizes. Each school board now has a four-year action plan in place to reduce class sizes, making elementary the first priority.

This year, a program that is bringing $38 million in technology into classrooms gets under way. As one example, with the co-operation of school boards, all schools will be linked to the Internet by Dec. 30. Each of the province's 10,000 teachers and 165,000 students can be linked, with individual e-mail addresses, to classrooms and classmates around the world.

New courses and curriculum are also in place -- some provincewide and others reflecting local priorities. As an example, a new elementary physical education curriculum is being put in place across the province. The emphasis is on helping children understand the importance of fair play and of being physically active, beginning with their first days in school. As another example, a new junior high mathematics course focuses on problem-solving, hands-on activities and logical thinking skills that reinforce an effective approach to problems facing students in all subject areas.

All school boards are participating in Reading Recovery, an early-intervention program focused at Grade 1 where teachers work one-on-one to get young readers back on track. Provincewide, more than 80 per cent of students perform at or above the class average in reading and writing three years after the training ends.

New courses in design, oceans and aquaculture, entrepreneurship and cultural industries, tourism, electro-technologies, and career transitions are being piloted or adopted in high schools across the province. The courses are linked to local economic interests and priorities.

"The goal is to give students more choice in high school -- so they have more choices when they graduate," said Education and Culture Minister Robbie Harrison.

The arts is also a growing influence in Nova Scotia schools. In co-operation with the Nova Scotia Arts Council, a research project called Arts inFusion is one of seven projects across

Canada selected for the J.W. McConnell Foundation's Arts Smarts program. Over the next three years, seven schools are being linked with 14 artists in areas that include music, dance, visual arts, drama and writing. The goal is to share ways to enhance student learning through fine arts in schools across the province. The participating schools are: Whitney Pier Junior High; R. B. Dickie Elementary, Amherst; Leslie Thomas Junior High, Lower Sackville; Newport Station and Coldbrook and District schools, Annapolis Valley; Islands Consolidated, Freeport; and Mahone Bay School.

Each school board also sets individual priorities, based on interests in their schools and communities. For example, in the Halifax Regional School Board, a new African drumming program is being piloted at Ross Road Junior High School and Sir Robert Borden Junior High School. Cape Breton-Victoria is piloting Gaelic language and Gaelic through the arts programs at Rankin School in Iona. These programs will be shared with other school boards once developed.

The education minister said one theme must dominate the new school year: quality learning first. "We all must continue to dedicate our efforts to the quality of learning our children receive. That means healthy, safe schools, and high quality programs designed to meet the individual needs of students," said Mr. Harrison. "To every student and teacher -- welcome back, and have a great year."

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Contact: Donna MacDonald
Education and Culture
902-424-2615
E-mail: macdondc@gov.ns.ca

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